We were sorry to hear about your and our friend Carl. — *a card signed by 33 members of the Grace Community Church of Christ, Caruthersville, Mo.*

I could list many things I learned from Carl Ketcherside, but let me share four of the most important: (1) All truths are equally true but all truths are not equally important; (2) Since God created us as thinking beings, the only unity possible for people who think is unity within diversity; (3) I have no more right to choose my brothers and sister in Christ than I have to select my brothers and sisters in the flesh, for common parentage determines both; (4) If God accepts me as I am, warts and all, then I should accept my brothers and sisters in Christ in spite of their errors. — *David Reagan, Plano, Tx.*

May 25, 1989 marked the end of the long controversial life of a talented, influential, well-known preacher among Churches of Christ and Christian Churches . . . Friend and foe alike attest to his power in the pulpit and on the debate platform. —L. A. Stauffer in *Guardian of Truth*

BOOK NOTES

The Bleating Sheep by Robert W. Blackshear contends that the great need of our day is for the church, as God's sheep, to be nourished by godly, qualified elders, who are to be shepherds to the flock. It calls for Body life and mutual ministry, and it questions the modern minister system. It is well titled in that it is a "crisis" book, emerging from the agonizing needs of Churches of Christ. I read this book in manuscript form and told the author that if we believed and practiced what is set forth we would be a far more fruitful people. I am confident you will agree. $6.00 postpaid.

Michael Green is always worth reading, and this goes for his *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, which was first published in 1975 but is now in a new edition. It treats virtually every aspect of the Holy Spirit, along with a chapter on the charismatic movement. While not himself charismatic, he seeks to be a bridgebuilder between those that are and those that are not. The thrust of the book is that the Holy Spirit is the means of unity in the church. $12.95 postpaid.

What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage by Olan Hicks is a liberating book for those caught up in all the legalism on this complex subject. The author believes that there is no law of God that forbids any divorced person from marrying. And he draws an important distinction between commiting adultery and "living in adultery," There is no such thing as the latter, he contends. Persuasive and biblical. $13.95 postpaid.

Since we have them on hand and would like to put them in the hands of those who would appreciate them, we will send you 18 back copies of this paper, selected at random over the past 25 years, for only $3.00. This is especially for our more recent readers who would like to see what we have been saying through the years. Selected back issues are 40 cents each plus postage.

We will still send you a free copy of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett when you send us 8 subs to this paper at $3.00 each (total $24.00), including your own, new or renewal. But you must request the book. Otherwise you may purchase this widely-read and sometimes controversial history for $24.00, which is bargain enough since it is over 700 pages. We pay the postage when you pay in advance.

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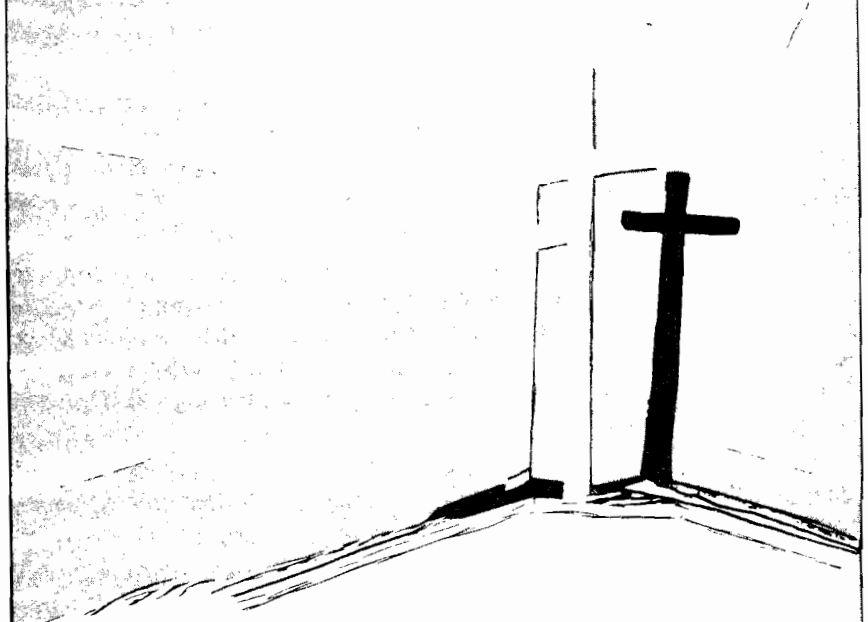

If one wanted to find a germinal word to link all sins, perhaps *hate* would do it. In terms of action, however, the long term consequences of hate are self-destruction. Thus the wages of sin really are death.--*Karl Menninger*

In This Issue:

The Church as a Halfway House

Volume 31, No. 8 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **October,1989**

The Hope of the Believer...No. 8

JESUS TALKED WITH THE "DEAD" ABOUT HIS DEATH

Heaven and earth meet in a glorious way on the Mount of Transfiguration. We don't know for sure what mountain it was, maybe Tabor or Great Hermon, but it doesn't matter. The story is told by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. All three tell us that Peter, James, and John went with Jesus into the mountain. Matthew and Mark say their purpose was to be alone; Luke says they went there to pray. All three preserve for us the basic facts, that while Jesus was there with them in the mount he was transfigured before them.

Mark explains transfigured by saying Jesus's clothes became dazzling white, "brighter than any earthly bleacher could make them." Matthew explains transfigured by saying Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light. Luke says he was praying when he was transfigured and that the aspect of his face was changed and that his clothes became brilliant as lightning.

All three evangelists tell us that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and talked with him, but it is Luke who adds two crucial points to the story. He says that Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory," which tells us that there was real heaven present in this earthly scene. Even more impressive is that Luke tells the reader what Moses and Elijah talked about: "they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem."

This establishes my thesis that Jesus talked to the "dead" about his own death. It is a scintillating story, one that is full of exciting implications and of one that should thrill our hearts and buoy up our hope

I put "dead" in quotes because Moses and Elijah were not dead in the sense that they no longer lived. They were very much alive, for they knew what was going on on earth and were dispatched by God to encourage his Son to drink the cup the Father had served him. They appeared in glory because they were in glory. For the moment part of heaven had come down to earth. The apostles saw what few mortals have ever seen, residents of heaven talking to a man upon the earth. They must have marvelled to the point of being speechless. Peter eventually says some crazy thing about building three abodes for each of those he sees in glory, but Mark and Luke both say that Peter did not know what he was saying. All three record that they were frightened.

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While we may conclude that God arranged this glorious experience especially for the encouragement of Jesus as he faced the Cross, we may also see in it a means of strengthening the apostles and giving them hope of a triumphant future. Jesus must have known something of what was going to happen on the mount, and he saw to it that it was witnessed by weak, mortal man. But he took only three of the apostles with him, the three he usually selected on special occasions. In Mk. 5:37 it says that he permitted only Peter, James, and John to go with him into a home for a special ministry. This shows that Jesus was training both an outer circle of disciples and an inner circle. In the mountain the three select apostles bore witness to a heavenly display of glory that affected their testimony for the rest of their lives.

In 2 Pet. 1:16-18 Peter points back to the Transfiguration experience as he bore witness to the gospel, recalling what he had seen and heard when he was with Christ "in the holy mountain." In John 1:14 another of the three apostles recalls the experience as he identifies Jesus with the Word become flesh: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth."

What a show that was on the holy mountain! It served as a stage suspended between heaven and earth. The actors were the two great luminaries of Israel's religion, Moses and Elijah, along with the Christ himself. Angels too vast to number made up the audience. And yet lowly fishermen of our tiny planet were given a box seat so they could gain some insight into the vastness of the glorious Christ and share it with the rest of us mortals. It is one more instance of the magnanimity of God's grace. And it is one more reason why the believer can abound in hope, for what those three men saw on that occasion anticipates the glory that will be for all those who are destined to become like the glorious Christ. What a blessed hope that is!

This story indicates that once the deceptive barriers of "this world" are removed there is a close fellowship between the "living" and the "dead." The apostles did not have to be told who Moses and Elijah were. They recognized them at once even though they had never before seen them. And Moses and Elijah, though "dead" for centuries, knew exactly what was going on upon earth. Language was spoken, which may have in this instance been the universal tongue of angels spoken in heaven or their own earthly dialect, but in either case they all understood it alike. The point is that there was meaningful dialogue and fellowship related to what the God of heaven was up to. And whether one was already in heaven or yet upon earth did not matter. For the moment on that mountain the saints on earth and those in heaven were as much together as if they were sitting in the same assembly.

We might think of Moses and Elijah as representatives of their particular eras. Moses represents the Old Covenant and all the promises that pointed to the coming Christ, and his presence shows that all this is being realized in Jesus Christ. Elijah represents the prophets who told of the coming Christ, and his presence proclaims this fulfilled. When God at last speaks from heaven, he lays down the foundation truth of our faith, anticipated by the law and the prophets: "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mk. 9:7).

Here we have the basis of discipleship and the bond of union. When we heed the call of the Transfiguration and resolve to follow Jesus Christ unconditionally we are truly his disciples, and we are at one with all others who so resolve.

This great truth served as a corrective to Peter's impetuousness, who because he saw three men "in glory" wanted to build a tent for each of them, one for Moses and Elijah as much as for Jesus. This is the flaw that often makes discipleship conditioned upon our own will. We want God to do it our way! Each wants his own little tent in glory!

It was a fearful moment for the apostles when Moses and Elijah disappeared as suddenly as they appeared. The glory had passed. Only Jesus stood there with them as before. But the message was clear. Others may share Christ's glory but no one else, not even a Moses or an Elijah, is his equal as God's own son. *Hear Jesus Christ* is heaven's mandate to sinful humanity!

The Transfiguration must have been a turning point in the pilgrimage of our Lord, serving as the occasion on which Jesus resigns himself to face the Cross. If Jesus "grew" in stature and wisdom, and did not start out full grown in every respect, as Lk. 2:52 indicates, then he might well have come to see the full measure of "the cup" that he was to drink only gradually. We know that he did not start his ministry by talking about his death. He talked rather of life, repentance, the coming kingdom, and he was at first highly successful. He first went out to bring "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" back to God. He did not go to the Gentiles. He might well have supposed at the outset, that as God's prophet for the new age, he would be able to do just that, bring his own people back to God.

But the powers of evil conspired. The Jewish system itself rejected him, seeing him as a threat. They had the power to turn even the people against him. The tables were turned. Jesus now had to hide out and to take precautions not at first necessary. It was only then that he began to talk to his disciples about his own death.

The turning point may have been when he left Galilee and went into Tyre and Sidon (Mk. 7:24). Mark says he did not want anyone to know where he was. It looks as if he might have been there for some time, even though he did not succeed in completely getting away from it all. Was this when he came to see more clearly what God intended for him: that he was to receive from the hand of his own Father "the cup" that only he could drink? It was upon his return from Tyre that he began to warn his disciples of the leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees, and only then, according to Mark, did he make the first mention of his impending death, which he was to repeat again and again. Then comes the glory of the Transfiguration.

There is no way for us to fathom the mystery of the Cross, as to why God should will that Jesus should die for all mankind. No theory is wholly satisfactory. It is enough for us to see that Jesus, however relunctantly, at last accepted this as his great task. The mystery is compounded by the fact that Jesus realized that it was not the Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities who imposed upon him the sentence of death, for they were but instruments in God's hand. It was God himself who served

his son the cup of untold agony and suffering. And it was to the Father himself that he in the end implored that the cup might be withdrawn: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mk. 14:36).

This pitiful scene should wrench our souls in that it focuses upon the indescribable suffering of our Lord and lays bear what it means to be a Christian. In that agonizing cry to heaven he is like a little child in great distress. *Abba, Father!,* he cries out as a helpless Jewish child would. "It is possible for you to save me from this, Please!," he was saying. What mattered most to Jesus in that agonizing hour was that he do his Father's will. Then came the prayer of resignation, "Not what I will, but what You will."

For his own eternal reasons the God of heaven did not withdraw the cup, but he gave his son the grace to bear it. Part of the preparation was the Transfiguration. God sent Moses and Elijah to be with Jesus. The record says they talked about "the decease which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31). Was this an explanation of why God was so acting or was it encouragement in the face of a great ordeal? We only know that it was the Cross that was the subject or the "Exodus" as a whole.

The word for decease or departure is the Greek word exodus. Moses had lead an exodus, and now he was talking to Jesus about the exodus he would lead. The curtain would fall in the impending events in Jerusalem. It would all be over. Our Lord would make his exodus, which is different from dying. Jesus did not "die" in any real sense. He rather made his departure. And that is what Moses and Elijah talked to him about.

Our Lord suffered agonizing loneliness, not only as a reject of his own people, but as a reject of heaven as well. His great task now clearly defined, he set his face toward the cross. Elijah and Moses were there to help him through it all.

Because of the great truths of the Transfiguration we are able to face tomorrow. It prepares us for our exodus from this world. It shows us that we are not going to die anymore than Jesus died — or Moses and Elijah — but that we are going to depart. And it shows us that when we lose ourselves in doing God's will all will be well, no matter what comes. Even when we may not quite grasp what is going on. We don't have to understand.

Our departure? If heaven and earth got together on that mountain and talked about Jesus' departure from this world, why should we not share with each other the glory we share as joint heirs with Christ? If you are a true believer you have a reserved seat. It is in fact marked "In glory," which is more than first class.

The likes of Moses and Elijah may come calling at anytime. Or will it be your saintly mother or that darling grandchild. "Departure time!" they will tell us. And what a show we are in for! It will then be evident what should already be apparent, that nothing else in this life really matters except our exodus from this evil world.
— *the Editor*

HAPPY 100TH ANNIVERSARY!

It is with some trepidation that I remind my sisters and brothers in the Churches of Christ that we have allowed our 100th birthday anniversary to come and go with little notice. While a person usually feels put upon to be reminded of a birthday that makes him too old, the Churches of Christ are reluctant to accept their centennial anniversary because it makes them too young.

So long as we nurture the mentality of "Founded 33 A.D.," which once graced the cornerstones of our buildings, it will not make sense for us to speak of a mere centennial. The Russian Orthodox Church recently celebrated its 1000th anniversary. It would surely be surprised to learn that there is a denomination in the Unites States that claims to be almost twice that old — especially since the United States itself is little more than 200 years old!

While some well-meaning souls among us still issue tracts to the effect that the "Church of Christ" dates back to Pentecost 33 A.D., there are more responsible voices that speak of our beginning in 1906, the year the U.S. Census Bureau first listed us as separate from the Christian Churches. The data indicates, however, that we were a separate people some two decades before 1906. In 1892 Daniel Sommer, one of our founding fathers, made this amazing assessment:

> The Sand Creek Declaration is being adopted, and those who will not do right are purged out as old leaven. In course of a few years the Church of Christ will stand entirely separated from the Christian Church. Then there will be no more fellowship between them than there now is between the Church of Christ and any other branch of sectarianism. Hallelujah. (*Octographic Review*, Vol. 35 (May 24, 1889), p. 1)

The Sand Creek "Address and Declaration" was read to several thousands of "conservative" Disciples of Christ who gathered near Windsor, Illinos as a statement of withdrawal of fellowship from the "liberal" Disciples of Christ. It was a bull of excommunication, which concluded with:

> In closing up this address and declaration, we state that we are impelled from a sense of duty to say, that all such innovations and corruptions to which we have referred, that after being admonished, and having had sufficient time for reflection, if they do not turn away from such abominations, that we cannot and will not regard them as brothers.

The "abominations" were such things as choirs, societies, the pastor system, and instrumental music. The document made it clear that fellowship was contingent upon seeing these "objectionable and unauthorized things" alike. It was this tragic fallacy that bequeathed to us a century of further divisions and factions. Each sect among us has its own list of objectionable and unauthorized things and makes them tests of fellowship.

But there is no segment among us that can trace itself farther back in history than 1889. By identifying ourselves with the larger Stone-Campbell Movement we can go back another century for our beginning. But there we have to stop. We are disinclined to follow the Landmark Baptists in "rattling a chain" all the way back to Pentecost, for they claim kin to such unlikely folk as the Manichaens, Novatians, and Anabaptists. If they are looking for Baptists as we know them today, the chain turns into a rope that won't rattle and threatens to hang them. Churches of Christ would do no better, nor would any other modern denomination. And to discard the chain and take in hand a pole and vault over all the centuries back to Pentecost and thus become the true "restored" church does not work any better. Both are false interpretations of history, the latter even ignoring history.

Where was what we call "the Church of Christ" in 1517 when Martin Luther tacked his theses to that cathedral door and launched the Protestant Reformation? Where were we when the preaching of Peter the Hermit fired the First Crusade in 1095? Where were we when the Council of Carthage met in 397 to fix the canon of the New Testament?

While we can believe that the community of Jesus Christ has been on this earth ever since the Spirit of God breathed it into existence on the day of Pentecost, however imperfect, we cannot properly believe that any modern religious group exclusively represents that church and has done so all through the centuries. Some of the Orthodox denominations would be the oldest, but even they cannot claim exclusive identity with the Body of Christ revealed in Scripture.

Since every denomination or religious movement has had its beginning, we can properly name August 18, 1889 as the beginning of Churches of Christ. And what can possibly be wrong with that admission? While it may question a naive view of history held by some, it makes us no less Christian and it might make us more honest Christians.

Some of my readers did not let our centennial anniversary pass without notice, and one of them, Bob Keen of Hancock, Michigan, was especially prescient. He and his wife Karen made a trip to Sand Creek and walked about the grounds of the old meetinghouse, "part of a conscious and on-going effort to recover from a Sommeritic childhood," as he put it. While there he mailed me a "Happy Anniversary" card boldly cancelled and postmarked "Windsor, IL Aug 18 A.M. 1989," Windsor being the nearest post office, less than four miles away. An attending note read "From the postmark you'll understand." I do understand, and I appreciate Bob's sense of humor as well as his sense of history.

Then there was a letter, dated August 18, 1989, from a Disciples of Christ

minister, Neal Buffaloe, in Conway, Arkansas, who has spent most of his years in the Church of Christ. He wrote:

> Not many days ago I was re-reading portions of your *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (I have read it twice in its entirety and have returned many times to certain passages) and took note of your emphasis (p. 592) on the date August 18, 1889, as "a suitable date for the beginning of the Church of Christ." Sommer's Sand Creek gathering and reading of the Document constituted a landmark event. I thought it appropriate to write you on the anniversary of that date, and I wager that I am the only person in the entire world who is taking note of it.

I wrote back to my dear friend of many years that he would have lost his bet, for he was not the only one who remembered. In fact there was a seminar conducted on the old Sand Creek site honoring the occasion, attended by some 100 people and sponsored by a Church of Christ in the area, with historian Earl West as one of the speakers. The seminar recalled what took place at Sand Creek as "The meeting was a prime event in the national division of the Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ."

Neal Buffaloe said other things in his letter that deeply impressed me. "I cherish my background in the Church of Christ," he said, "and within my limited sphere, attempt to move as freely among them as you do all the branches of the movement." And he wrote sympathetically of Daniel Sommer: "He was obviously a man of great conviction, and while I may regret all that took place then, I think we do well to pause and take note of those who followed the courage of their convictions." He went on to express confidence that our people and the whole church will one day be one.

Even though circumstances were such that Neal decided to leave the Church of Christ and work with the Disciples, he no less cherishes his Church of Christ heritage. He has learned to be selective in drawing upon the lessons that history teaches. He can appreciate the noble intentions and the untiring efforts of a Daniel Sommer without agreeing with every thing he did. This would be true of the history of every religious body. We all have tares growing with the wheat.

The Churches of Christ of today can and should look back to Sand Creek with both a critical and an appreciative attitude, and certainly with more sympathy than censure for the old pioneers who blazed the trail the best they knew how. So let us come to terms with who and what we are and celebrate our Centennial without apology. — *the Editor*

There are times when we can never meet the future with sufficient elasticity of mind, especially if we are locked in the contemporary systems of thought. We can do worse than remember a principle which gives us a firm Rock and leaves us the maximum elasticity for our minds: the principle: Hold to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted.— *Herbert Butterfield*

THE CHURCH AS A HALFWAY HOUSE

As an editor I often learn more from my readers than they learn from me. This was the case in some of the responses I received from my article in last month's issue about the gay church. Some were outraged at the idea of a gay church, as if the church is made up of only the nice and proper. Others left the impression that they consider homosexsual sins as not only more serious than heterosexual sins but as the most grievous of sins. I got the distinct impression from some readers that they see the church as made up of righteous people, not of "sinners saved by grace," as we have historically claimed, even if lamely.

This challenges a view of the church I have long held, that it is a community of believers who realize that they are sinners in need of God's grace. They are not good; they only seek to be good; they are not righteous; they only hunger for righteousness. I like the imagery of the church as a halfway house, which Webster defines as "a place where persons are aided in readjusting to society following a period of imprisonment, hospitalization, etc." To make that a good description of the task of the church we might add, "and to help restore them to communion with God and the fellowship of believers."

Other imageries from modern society might be to think of the church as a hospital for those sick with sin or as a refugee camp for weary, erring displaced persons. The church is not a country club of well people who are self-sufficient and in need of nothing. It is not a Fifth Ave. establishment that has everything going its way.

If the church is made up of "righteous" folk, then it comes under the judgment of Christ himself who spoke a parable to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Lk. 18:9). In that parable Jesus recognized the man as righteous who realized he was not righteous, but who humbly prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." The unrighteous man, according to Jesus, was the one who claimed to be righteous! He was the one who was thankful that he was not like those awful sinners out there! I am concerned for my sisters and brothers who appear to be more like the self-righteous Pharisee than the self-denigrating publican. The lowly publican was so conscious of his own sins that he was blind to the sins of the Pharisee. Jesus was impressed, concluding that he went down to his house "righteous" rather than the "religious" guy.

Or we might think of the church as made up of "wrestlers with sin," to use the imagery in Heb. 12:4, which is one of the great neglected passages: "You have not yet resisted unto bloodshed, striving against sin." We have not yet overcome sin; we have not left it behind. We continue to strive against it, both in our personal lives and in the world. The church is in a crucible with sin, a wrestling contest. A wrestling match may not be a pleasant experience. It involves pain, discipline, hardship. It is a fight to the finish with a fierce opponent. We are in a war with all

the crafty devices of Satan. The church is not a social club or a theatre of spectators where those present relax themselves on "flowery beds of ease." We are all in a war together, helping each other in the struggle against sin.

The best illustration of what I am saying is not any church that I know, but the Alcoholics Anonymous, whose meetings I have also visited. Each one readily admits that he is a drunk and in need of help. No one has it made; no one is untainted. It is remarkable how in their mutual sharing each one begins his testimony by saying, "My name is such and such and I am an alcoholic." Even if one has been sober for years, he still sees himself as a drunk. This is the secret of their success: they are all in it together. They accept each other unconditionally; they are not judgmental, not even when one turns back to drinking. No one expects perfection, and if one falls there is someone there with a helping hand. They reach out in love and acceptance and start over with but one goal, to be sober today.

The AA is thus more like the primitive Christians than are our modern churches. In visiting any church today I would be surprised to hear such as: "Good morning, my name is John Brown and I am a sinner saved by grace. All of us here are sinners, looking to God and to each other for help in our struggle. Maybe we can help you." If there was more of that then I admit there would be no need for a gay church! But the sinners out there in the world hear the modern church say, "We welcome you so long as you are not too different from us, and of course we're good Christian people."

An ancient document, written by Pliny, a Roman governor, to Trajan the emperor, in 112 A.D., describes a worship service of early Christians. The governor tells how the Christians met before daybreak on "an appointed day" to sing hymns to Christ as to a god. He says that in their assembly they would join in an oath "not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery, and breach of faith, and not to deny any deposit when it is claimed." That in their assembly they would swear an oath not to sin indicates that they were something of a halfway house for sinners. It is probable that people today would be as impressed by this as a pagan governor was then.

The response from my readers has also led me to reexamine the nature of sin, especially in reference to the greater sins. Some churches have led divorced people to suppose that they have committed just about the greatest sin. Adultery is of course high on the list of condemned sins, perhaps because adultery is not usually a church sin. But no sin is seen as more grievous than homosexuality.

My readers are of course right that sexual sins, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are grievous sins against God, but are they more grievous than the sins of the modern church? The great theologians of the church through the centuries have insisted that sins of the heart are greater than the sins of the flesh. The medieval theologians named "the seven deadly sins," but not one of them is sexual. They are sins of heart and mind more than of the flesh. Pride heads the list as the root of all

sin, followed by envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust. Luther named ingratitude as the worst of all sins. Augustine listed all sins as either "carnalities" or "animosities" and saw the latter as most serious. Church folk tend to see sensual sins as primary, but theologians are agreed that pride is the primal sin, particularly the pride of power, virtue, and knowledge. It is a temptation for church folk to be proud of their religion and their good works. One theologian notes that in the teaching of Jesus inordinate self-love is the root of all sin.

To Jesus the most serious sins are pretense, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. While he had a high level of tolerance toward prostitutes, women taken in adultery, and the common "sinners" of his day, he denounced the Pharisees as hypocrites who "devour widow's houses, and for a pretense make long prayers" (Mt. 23:14). He insisted that such ones would receive greater condemnation. He taught that defilement comes more from the heart than from the passions, more from within than from without. In Mk. 7:21 Jesus names a dozen sins that defile us, of mind and body alike, but the emphasis is upon such spiritual sins as pride, folly, greed, malice, deceit, envy. These are the sins that have a way of going to church.

Paul, exposed as he was to the sins of Greeks and Romans, scores the grossest of both sensual and mental sins: sexual sins not only include adultery and homosexuality but pederasty (sex between a man and a boy) as well (1 Cor. 6:9), and these sins were dealt with in a redemptive way in the church at Corinth. Paul's list of spiritual sins include those named by Jesus (greed, malice, envy, etc), but also wrangling, treachery, spite, rudeness, rebellion to parents, and even "without brains, honor, love or pity" (Rom. 1:29-30). But when Paul looks within his own soul he sees his own covetousness as "exceedingly sinful" (Rom. 7:7,13). He did not name anyone but himself as "the chief of sinners."

Since homosexuality is a subject at issue, we may conclude that when the apostle condemns homosexuality he almost certainly is referring to certain homosexual acts, not to the state of being homosexual, which Paul probably was not aware of, just as he was unaware of alcoholism. In the above list he includes drunkenness as a sin, but surely Paul would not name the disease of alcoholism as a sin. He would say that the alcoholic should summon the resources available in Christ and not allow himself to become a drunkard. So with being gay. One may have no control over the fact that he is homosexual, but the apostle would insist that he nonetheless behave himself in a way that conforms to Christ's call for holiness, without which we cannot please God. We may never become wholly holy, but it is to be our heart's desire.

Well, there is surely enough sin in this article to go around. My point is made. The church should act as a halfway house for sinners. We are all in the struggle against sin together. If we are tempted to be intolerant of those who struggle with sensual sins, supposing them to be less righteous than ourselves, we should remember that it is our own sins of heart and mind that may be more grievous before

God, such as selfish pride. The sexual sins out there in the world (and in the church) are surely abhorrent to a holy God, but the great sin of the modern church, our preoccupation with our own self-importance, may be far more abhorrent.

Surely the church as a halfway house cannot be too loving, too compassionate, too accepting toward those who are caught up in sin. We cannot, of course, become tolerant of sin itself. The rule of love the sinner but hate the sin still holds, but this must be more than so much talk. How do we love the sinner except by reaching out to him with understanding and acceptance, like Jesus did? A good rule to follow in hating sin itself is to make sure that we despise sin as we see it in our own lives more than in the lives of others.

We sing that great line from Isaac Watts, "When I survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died, I count my richest gain but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride." But aren't we a bit hypocritical? Come now, do we really pour contempt on our pride? My recent impression is that we show far more contempt for gays and lesbians than we show toward our own sinful pride. The issue here is not only to offer some defense of a minority group that is persecuted by the church itself, but to stand up for the integrity of the church as a redemptive community. — *the Editor*

Visiting Other Churches: New Series, No. 8...

THE BAPTISTS: "THE STATE CHURCH OF TEXAS"

The joke I sometimes share with my Baptist friends about the Baptist church being the state church of Texas I first heard at Harvard where there are not all that many Baptists around. When I first met one of my professors, he said, "Ah, from Texas. Are you a Baptist? I hear the Baptist church is the state church of Texas!"

By sheer numbers alone Texas does seem to be in the hands of Baptsts. There are 2.3 million of them in the state, and on any given Sunday 500,000 of them will be in church. There are twice as many Baptists than Methodists and eight times more Baptists than Presbyterians. Texas Baptists have their own journal, the *Baptist Standard*, with a circulation of 335,000. Nashville may be the Baptist capital of the world but Texas is its heartland. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has 50 colleges, the largest, Baylor University, is in Texas.

There are 54 SBC churches in my home county, and I have visited all of them that fall within the Denton city limits, which was quite a feat, especially when you add a number of non-SBC Baptist churches that I also visited. I thought I would never get around to them all, and I was not long in concluding what some Baptists

themselves acknowledge: There are too many of them. Some are small and struggling. One independent church I visited (started years back by some preacher who wanted his own church), with no more than 25 in attendance, petitioned the SBC for membership so as to survive. The SBC turned them down since they had a church only two blocks away!

The most unusual of all my church visits was to an independent Baptist church, where the minister actually owns the church along with the adjoining parsonage. He reigns not as a lord but as a tyrant. It was the first time I ever heard a pastor berate and abuse his members with incredible harshness. I was one of some 20 people who took this abuse. He called us liars, cheats, fornicators, and condemned us all to hell, and this went on and on. He also berated all the modernists and infidels in the other Baptist churches in town. I could hardly believe what I was witnessing, and I wondered how he could possibly have anyone at all there to hear him excoriate Sunday after Sunday. I at last decided that it was a case of a sick man preaching to a sick audience. It was sadistic. His subjects enjoy being horsewhipped once a week. I afterwards spoke gently to him of the grace of God, but I got nowhere. But I left with more pity for him than censure.

There is, however, another church in town, named McKinney Street Baptist, an SBC church, that I would rank near the top of all churches I've visited. It is very friendly and has lots of enthusiasm, and a good mixture of young and old. They have a new building and are growing, and they take spiritual matters seriously. No gimmickry that I noticed. The pastor, one of the best in town I'd say, speaks from his heart and from the Word, and he says something without shouting. On the Sunday I heard him he gently criticized Oral Roberts for his "God will kill me unless" means of raising money. "God is not in the hostage taking business," he said, which I thought was too good not to jot down. The man preaches grace.

First Baptist is of course the big church with an elegant edifice, and the visitor has to concede that their ad "We've got something for everyone" is right on target. They do everything right for the visitor: welcome and tag him, make over him, and at last write him a letter. Everything is punctual and professional, as if run by a computer, and yet it is not cold.

When one goes from the wealthy First church to the poor Mexican and black Baptist churches the contrast is depressing. One sees that irrespective of denomination it is our culture that shapes our churches and not the other way around. The minority churches and the white churches are two different worlds, divided between the haves and the have-nots. That they are of the same denomination means nothing. The apparent injustice of some having so much and others having so little, when all bear the name of Christ, does not seem to be a problem to the white middle-class churches.

The showpiece of Baptist wealth and power is the First Baptist Church in nearby Dallas, which has 24,000 members and an $8 million annual budget, the

largest SBC church in the world. Its facilities, which cover several square blocks of downtown Dallas, is valued at $200 million. It has a radio station, day school from kindergarten through high school, a seminary, three parking garages, a gym, etc. During this entire century it has had but two pastors. Its present pastor, W. A. Criswell, who began his ministry in 1944, is known for his business acumen as much as for his preaching. He made one real estate deal for the church that netted $4 million. He has also made himself personally rich. They tell the joke on him that when he appeared before the pearly gates and sought entrance on the basis of being a minister of the gospel, there was some delay. At last the gates opened with an apology, "Sorry for the delay. We had you listed under real estate!"

First Baptist in Dallas is a leader in the present controversy over liberalism and inerrancy, which has all but split the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Criswell has his own seminary — fundamental, premillennial, evangelical — which stands in contrast to the more moderate, mainline Protestant seminaries, such as nearby Southwestern Baptist in Ft. Worth, the largest of SBC's six seminaries. The inerrantists (no errors in the Bible) have gained control of the SBC power structure and threaten to fire the moderates and liberals in the seminaries. Some think the inerrantists will split the SBC and start another denomination before they will yield power to "the liberals." So far a split has been averted, but the SBC is a church walking on eggshells, caught between a demand for conformity and a desire to be free. A secretary at the local Denton County Baptist Association told me when I asked her about the controversy expressed the way most Baptists feel, "I wish it would just go away."

The inerrantists are the old-line fundamentalist Baptists after the order of the late fiery J. Frank Norris, who once shot a man dead in his Ft. Worth church office and a hero to Criswell, who have been resistant to change. They gave up segregation with reluctance, oppose gay and feminist causes, barely tolerate blacks, resist all efforts to bring women into the ministry (Criswell says a woman can be a pastor if she is "the husband of one wife" like the Bible says), and never hesitate to mix religion and politics. They managed to keep a progressive state like Texas dry by law until 1971, and kept horserace gambling out of the state until only recently. They keep school prayer, the teaching of creationism, and supervision of biology textbooks lively political issues. They are not ecumenical and can be very sectarian. The head of Criswell's seminary said with all sincerity on national TV that Mother Teresa could not go to heaven unless she had the "born again" experience that fundamentalists talk about.

But to understand the Baptist story one must see the great diversity of the Baptist world. There is W. A. Criswell and the fundamentalists, but there is also Harry Emerson Fosdick, the gifted liberal pastor of the famed Riverside Church in New York, who led the fight against fundamentalism a generation ago with his famous sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" There are those who would fire those in the seminaries who believe in modern Biblical scholarship, and then there

is Kenneth Scott Latourette of Yale, the dean of church historians. All Baptists!

This diversity is evident in the Baptist World Alliance, representing 30 million Baptists from 100 Baptist bodies in 117 nations. The SBC, the largest with 14 million members, represents less than half of all Baptists. There are 11 million in black conventions, the National Baptist Convention with 6.5 million being the largest. The largest liberal group is the American Baptist Convention, to which Harry Emerson Fosdick belonged, with 1.6 million. The oldest convention is also the smallest, the General Six-Principle Baptist, with only 160 members, which basis its faith on the six principles in Heb. 6:1-2.

The Baptists have a great heritage that goes back to 17th century English puritanism. Immigrating to Colonial America for the sake of religious freedom, they were not tolerated by the colonists. Roger Williams led them to Providence where they set up a colony that allowed for freeedom of religion and kept church and state separated, hallmarks of the Baptist heritage. The first Baptist church was organized in Providence in 1638. Baptists continued to immigrate from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and from eastern Europe. By 1775 they were the largest denomination in America with 1,150 churches. They founded Brown University, one of the "Ivy League" colleges, in 1764. Besides the doctrine of separation of church and state, the Baptists have long stood for the equality of all Christians, local church autonomy, individual freedom, baptism by immersion, salvation by faith, and a Biblical basis for doctrine and practice.

The visitor might see them at their best in the small Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, a black congregation in my hometown. Its pastor, the Rev. M. R. Chew, spoke for them all when he said in his sermon on March 27, 1988 when I was present: "No matter how bad things are, a little talk with Jesus makes a difference. And Jesus was nourished on Scripture, not Shakespeare." Easter season was in the offing. The pastor announced that for the next seven weeks he would preach on the seven sayings of Jesus on the Cross, one each Sunday. That would include the saying, "It is finished," he added. And I'll be telling you that he said "*It* is finished" not "*I* is finished"! — *the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

I suffered a rather severe allergic reaction from a drug I was taking, and as a precautionatry measure my physician put me in the hospital. Unable to work for more than a week and with Ouida having me to take care of as well as her mother, we are both behind in the affairs of this journal, including the shipment of books and correspondence. We are hopeful that we can put this issue in the mail almost on time. We appreciate your patience. I am back at work, including classes I teach in Dallas, but I am not yet at full strength. Ouida is doing great and will accompany me, the Lord willing, to Arkansas City, Ks., Oct. 14-15, where I will have sessions with both the Random Road Church of Christ and the Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Those of you who may join us there may call Dr. Max Foster for further information, 316-442-5034.

In his crusade in Little Rock Billy Graham spoke out on the drug war, likening it to an invasion of our country by a foreign enemy, or even worse than that. He pointed to what drugs are doing to the most helpless of our society: babies, children, and pregnant women. He is especially concerned about what drugs are doing to our young people who get caught and can't get out. He cited the use of crack, where one hit can hook a person for life. "These are problems," said the evangelist, "but the big problem is that of sin in the human heart."

In a brochure announcing the Council on Christian Unity Luncheon, held during the summer at the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis, Paul A. Crow, president of the Council, wrote some of the most penetrating things I have ever read about division and unity. He said division is caused by self-sufficiency, living within isolated, self-drawn walls. No reconciliation is possible, he said, without confessing our divisions, dying to ourselves, and calling upon God to shape the church as God wills. He went on to say that unity calls us to costly advocacy, to making it central in all decision-making phases of the church's life, that unity lies at the heart of the church's mission and caring for peoples of the world.

We have followed with great interest the making of the film, *Wrestling With God*, on the life of Alexander Campbell. It has at last all been shot, mostly at Bethany and under great trial and hardship, even in the rain. It should be ready to show by December. Ouida and I invite you to join us in helping to fund this worthy cause. The film is worth about one million, but it was made for only $125,000. Only $15,000 is needed to complete paying for it. We will be informing you on when and how you will be able to see it. Donations, which are tax deductible, should be sent to: Stone-Campbell Film Project, 3600 Berry Dr., Studio City, Ca. 91604.

I could easily fill this entire issue with the responses we have received from the piece I did in the last issue on my visit to a gay church. And it would make for interesting and informative reading! See under "Reader's Exchange" for a sample. The article was one more installment in a series I am still doing on my visits to all the churches in my home city, and not a treatise on homosexuality. I sought to be objective, as with all the churches I visit, and I tried to set forth both sides of the issues raised. The idea of a church for gays is of course repugnant to some people, just as homosexuality itself is a highly-charged emotional issue, one that some people just can't handle. Homophobiacs they may be, and I understand that since I too once feared homosexuals. So I was not surprised by the vigorous response, some of it emitting more heat than light, but I was surprised that some concluded from what I wrote that I approved of homosexual sins. It should go without saying, but I say it nonetheless for the sake of those that might sincerely conclude otherwise that of course I approve of no sexual sins, either homosexual or heterosexual. Yet I choose, as I believe Jesus did, not to condemn such ones but to save them. I do this by showing forbearing love and understanding toward all those who are caught up in very complex and baffling sexual problems, sometimes heterosexual and sometimes homosexual. I thought I detected in the responses a more basic problem: We have become a church that supposes it is better or less sinful than those sinners that we most disdain. This led me to write an article right out of my heart and mind. If you had any problem with the piece on the gay church, I hope you will read my "The Church As a Halfway House For Sinners" in this issue. It is not about homosexuality but about the nature of the church as I understand it. I welcome your response.

READER'S EXCHANGE

Thank you for your excellent article about Carl Ketcherside. The personal anecdotes you included were inspiring to me, and others have told me they, too, were encouraged by what you wrote to us all. — *Diane Kilmer, Integrity Magazine*

(If you would like to see the piece I did on Carl Ketcherside for *Integrity*, write and ask for that issue, which can serve as a sample copy in case you are not acquainted with that journal, one that you should be reading. Address: 2919 Lafayette Ave., Lansing Mi. 49606. —*Ed.*.)

I have been reading *Restoration Review* since I married Virgil in 1983. He's been taking your paper since the 1950's. I love reading about your wife's help and how sweet it is for both of you to care for her mother. We devour the paper whenever it comes. — *Fern Stapleton, Tucson, Az.*

I have only recently been exposed to your publication. I have enjoyed it immensely. I have been so excited because after reading it, I realize there is hope for the Church of Christ. I have been disillusioned with the church, for I had to go through a horrible marriage which ended in divorce, only to believe that I was doomed with no hope. Gradually I have come to see that God loves me anyway, that I am a good person, and that I can be saved. I like the way you present the different subjects, with Scriptures combined with good, common sense. It makes it all seem so simple, which it should be.— *Orange, Tx.*

I have moved from Barton W. Stone's home in Jacksonville, Illinois to Walter Scott's old stomping grounds on the Western Reserve. I pray that we will see another move of God as we did in their day. Keeping Christian unity as my polar star! — *Randy Massie, Louisville, Oh.*

I have read your writings so much over the years. I have especially enjoyed the series on your visits to the different denominations. How enlightening they have been! — *Jewel Iahn, Fenton, Mo.*

I loaned some back issues of your paper to my landlord. He's never returned them, and he is hooked on your writings. He recently subscribed on his own. So there, I got you another subscriber who is an avid reader of all you write. — *Vallejo, Ca.*

(Some of our most appreciate readers come to us this way. Why don't you share this paper with a friend? The results might be similar. — *Ed.*)

I will no longer listen to a preacher who has to apologize for preaching on grace. It is pathetic how such little things divide us. In my community of 55,000 there are at least six Churches of Christ, one of which is known for not eating in the building. — *Clear Creek, In.*

I have long been troubled by a question that apparently no one can answer: When does God cut off a congregation from His fellowship? Your article on "What Difference Do Differences Make" raised the question again. — *Lock Haven, Pa.*

GAY CHURCH

(Responses to my article on the gay church in the last issue provided some insightful and helpful observations on the complex subject of homosexuality. We offer some of them here, along with a general mix of what was in the mailbag. Since this is such an emotional issue I am withholding names and addresses. — *Ed.*)

Several years ago I visited a gay church and since that time the services at the straight church seem so empty. We righteous churches could learn a lot from those sinners about effective ministers and worship. Thanks for the courage. — *San Diego, Ca.*

Thank you for the subcription I have enjoyed until now. It would be hard for me to overstate my dismay at the position you have assumed in your treatment of sexual perversion. Please do not send *Restoration Review* any longer— *Memphis, Tn.*

I want to present you with a holy kiss through the mail. Your article has to be the most astounding expression of open acceptance ever to come out of the Church of Christ. I am not homosexual but I understand their love. My chosen path is to be a wife, mother, school teacher, but why is it so difficult for us to understand that not all are made alike and will not choose paths similar to ours? — *Auroro, Colorado*

It is distressing to see how far a person can drift from Christ when once he adopts error. To go so far as to say that Jesus accepted and associated (fellowshipped or had some common bond that tied them together spiritually with God) with homosexuals is preposterous. — *a minister in Missouri*

There are several good review articles in scientific literature concerning homosexuality which conclude that sexual orientation is largely influenced by prenatal brain hormonalization, but is also strongly dependent on postnatal socialization, which may become incorporated into the brain's immutable biology . In light of recently developed/ new perspectives from historical, Biblical and scientific research, it seems to me that we need to expand our dialogue on such issues within the churches. Your article may hopefully stimulate such. Thanks for your courage and integrity! — *a psychiatrist in Texas*

I cannot believe that God made most of us heterosexual and a minority homosexual. In one sense man is animal. Yet there is no evidence of homosexuality among the lower animals. Is homosexuality in part a *learned* behavior? Does a narrow social environment enter the picture? May an older person subvert a child into homosexuality? — *a professor in Tennessee*

As a recovering homosexual (in orientation, not in practice) I have done considerable research in the area of re-orientation. The best material I have seen on re-orientation is the August (1989) issue of *Christianity Today*. From my earlest recollection I thought of myself as female. I took the female parts in our play as children. I was Mommy, super-girl, or wife. I dressed as a female. When I reached puberty I was rejected by my peers for being effeminate. I considered suicide all through my teen years. I was sexually attracted to males, both children and adults. Sometimes I admitted this, sometimes I denied it. I married at age 22. When my first child was born I abused him, and through this I came to realize how I had been abused as a child, even sexually abused by my father. My mother wanted a girl and I realized I had been used as a substitute. At age 27 I began therapy. I am now 31. I see myself as now recovering from homosexuality. I am now not as depressed and am more confident in my heterosexuality. It could not have happened without the help of God. My current theory is that male homosexuality is a subset of narcissism with origins at age 17-18 months and before. One does not completely recover, but is always working on it. I have helped one man to overcome his homosexual behavior and am currently counselling with another. It is essential that we not require recovery, but rather to require effort. This is one of the principles of God's grace. I enjoy your paper and send it to a few people in the congregation where I preach. — *from a minister*

While I appreciate your attitude of love toward gays and lesbians, I am not sure I agree with you that they are born that way. Why would the Bible speak so strongly against homosexuality if one cannot help being gay? — *a minister in Texas*

John Boswell's book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, is the most scholarly work of which I am aware on the subject, particulary in reference to *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10. As a professor at Yale, Boswell has good credentials. He does not believe that either of the two passages refers to homosexuality. Another fine book that you would find informative is *The Vatican and Homosexuality*, which consists of articles about the recent Vatican letter on homosexuality which created so much controversy. In this book one writer stated well the frustration and pain of the lesbian and gay community: "We have been deprived of jobs and places to live, refused health care, abused in public, beaten in the streets, killed by drunks — and you want to deny us the protection of the law? The sins of society and the Church against gay people are far greater than any sin that can be committed by two people trying to express their love for one another." We continue to appreciate your writings. You have been a blessing to thousands of people and we certainly hope you will keep up this work for many years to come. -- *a reader in California*

(This informative material is enough to show that homosexuality is a far more complex matter than most of us realize. It is not a matter that is resolved by calling names, issuing threats, or even by quoting Scripture. It rather begs for understanding. Notice that the reformed homosexual minister, after struggling with the problem through a suicidal childhood, does not consider himself fully recovered even yet. With God's help he continues the effort, and he urges the church to use that approach by calling not for recovery but effort. Is the church to say to such ones that we will accept you only when you quit being gay, like right now? Does not such insensitivity run the risk of being far more sinful than what we are condemning? Several of the responses raised the puzzling question of how God could make some people gay, if indeed he does, and then condemn them for being that way. If they are "born gay" how can they be held responsible? One might be born with a particular predisposition without God having ordained it. Jesus referred to some who were "born eunuchs," but this does not mean that God made them that way. It was rather a birth defect. As our brother psychiatrist noted above, "prenatal brain hormonalization," along with certain postnatal influences, may cause some to be born gay or to become so early in life. But that doesn't mean God ordained it. It is an aberration that cannot be helped and therefore not sinful in itself. And yet any of us may sin against God by the choices we make in expressing our sexuality, gay or non-gay. By the power of the Holy Spirit sexual reorientation may be possible for some, perhaps for many, as in the case of the minister above. In any event we are to face the problem by loving and accepting each other, even as Christ has loved and accepted us. That is what the grace of God is all about. And it is

only through such forebearing love that we will be able to help each other through these seemingly insurmountable problems. — *the Editor)*

BOOK NOTES

We believe you would be impressed by our handsomely bound volumes of this journal. We now have six volumes, dating back to 1977, and the prices are moderate, not much more than the regular subscription. They are as follows. When you purchase all six volumes for $55.00, we pay the postage.

Principles of Unity and Fellowship (1977), $5.95

The Ancient Order (1978), $5.95

Blessed Are the Peacemakers and *With All The Mind*, (1979-80), $10.50

Jesus Today (1981-82), $10.50

The Doe of the Dawn (1983-84), $10.50

Adventures of the Early Church (1985-86), $12.50

Deacons: Male and Female by Stephen Sandifer challenges the all-male ministry position taken by Churches of Christ and others. He argues that a church may scripturally have both male and female deacons. $12.50 postpaid.

The Christian System by Alexander Campbell has been republished. It is a basic text for studying the old pioneer. $12.50 postpaid.

You will find *The Study and Use of the Bible*, by three different scholars, a liberating book in that it provides fresh insights into questions of inspiration and interpretation and new approaches to Bible study. $14.95 postpaid.

We still offer a free copy of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett when you send us eight subs to this journal, including your own,new or renewal, total $24.00, but you must request the book.

That great little book by John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, is again available to our readers at $6.50 postpaid. Based on the letters to the seven churches, it does tell us what Christ thinks of the church in every age.

K. C. Moser, who was one of the freer spirits in the Church of Christ of the past generation, wrote two books back in the 1950's that are as much or more in demand today than when he wrote them. That may mean he was ahead of his time. The books are *The Way of Salvation* and *The Gist of Romans*. They are strong on the grace of God. They are $6.25 each, postpaid.

A veritable goldmine of information on Paul and early Christianity is F.F. Bruce's *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. It is a 500-page study of the apostle in his historical, literary setting, and it is super. A book that you will return to again and again. $21.95.

We recommend several titles on Restoration history: *Endangered Heritage* by Walt Yancey ($12.95); *Moses Lard, That Prince of Preachers* by Kenneth Van Deusen ($14.95); *The Fool of God* by Louis Cochran, a historical novel on the life of Alexander Campbell ($10.95); *The Sage of Bethany: A Pioneer in Broadcloth* by Perry Gresham, also on Campbell ($12.95); *The Well Ordered Home, Alexander Campbell and the Family*, by Edwin Groover (12.95)

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RESTORATION REVIEW

If the efficacy of Christ's obedience does not extend to the saving of the pious heathens, what interpretation can we put on Rom. 5:12-21, where the professed purpose of the apostle's reasoning is to show, that the effects of Christ's obedience are greater than the consequences of Adam's disobedience?--*Apostolic Epistles*, James Macknight, p. 63.

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The Mormons: No Collections!

Volume 31, No. 9 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **November, 1989**